

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FOLLOWING REPEAT BOMBAY 481 SENT ACTION NEW DELHI

INFO CALCUTTA/MADRAS 26 FEB 76.

QUOTE:

BOMBAY 0481

EO 11652: NA

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SUBJECT: CHANGES IN MAHARASHTRA STATE CABINET - FEB 25

1. ON THE MORNING OF THE 2TH CHIEF MINISTER CHAVAN AS "JUST A PROCEDURE" TOOK THE RESIGNATIONS OF ALL MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. IN A CLOSELY GUARDED MOVE, AT 7:30 IN THE EVENING A MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE WAS ANNOUNCED. TWO SENIOR MINISTERS, VASANTRAO PATIL AND M.D. CHAUDHARI, AND A MINISTER OF STATE, R.V.BELOSE, WERE DROPPED FROM THE CABINET AND TEN NEW MEMBERS ADDED, THUS INCREASING THE CABINET FROM 24 TO 31 MEMBERS. MR CHAVAN STATED THAT HE RECEIVED EXPLICIT APPROVAL FOR THESE CHANGES FROM MRS GANDHI AND C.K. BOROOAH AND THE ENDORSEMENT OF LOCAL CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS, RAJNI PATEL AND P.K.SAWANT.

2. VASANTRAO PATIL, FORMER IRRIGATION MINISTER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF CONGRESS (R) IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE WAS CONSIDERED CHAVAN'S CHIEF RIVAL IN THE STATE. CHAUDHARI, THE FINANCE MINISTER, WAS A
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CLOSE CONFIDANT OF FORMER CHIEF MINISTER NAIK. BOTH MEN ARE KNOWN

TO FALL OUTSIDE THE INNER CIRCLE OF CHAVAN'S CONFIDANTS AND SUPPORTERS. THE EXCLUSION OF THESE TWO MEN FROM THE CABINET REPRESENTS A CONSOLIDATION OF CHAVAN'S POWER AND INFLUENCE IN STATE AFFAIRS BY MOVING TOWARD MORE HOMOGENEITY AT THE HIGHEST ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL. CHAVAN ALLUDED TO THE RELUCTANCE OF PATIL AND CHAUDHARI IN VACATING THEIR POSTS BY SAYING THAT HE "WOULD LIKE TO SAY THAT (THEY) HAD RESIGNED."

3. THE CABINET RESHUFFLE GIVES GREATER REPRESENTATION TO THE UNDERDEVELOPED MARATHWADA REGION, CHAVAN'S POLITICAL BASE IN MAHARASHTRA, AT THE EXPENSE OF THE WESTERN MAHARASHTRA DISTRICT (NOT INCLUDING BOMBAY). THE FOURTH ADMINISTRATIVE REGION, VIDARBHA IN EASTERN MAHARASHTRA, ALSO INCREASED ITS REPRESENTATION IN THE NEW CABINET.

4. IN TERMS OF CASTE, THE EARLIER POLICY OF CHIEF MINISTER NAIK, TO GIVE A LARGER REPRESENTATION TO NON-MARATHA AND NON-BRAHMIN GROUPS, WAS REVERSED TO FAVOR THE MARATHAS. MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS AND SCHEDULED CASTES REMAINED AT THE SAME LEVEL. MOST OF THE NEW MINISTERS HAVE BACKGROUNDS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT. THIS FACT AND THE INCREASED REPRESENTATION FROM BACKWARD AREAS IS CLEARLY MEANT TO DEMONSTRATE CHAVAN'S DETERMINATION IN IMPLEMENTING THE 20-POINT PROGRAM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES.

5. COMMENT: UNDER THE AEGIS OF MRS GANDHI AND THE NATIONAL CONGRESS (R) LEADERSHIP CHAVAN HAS CONSIDERABLY STRENGTHENED HIS POSITION IN MAHARASHTRA. THE GREATER HOMOGENEITY OF THE CABINET, THE ELIMINATION OF POLITICAL RIVALS PATIL AND CHAUDHARI, AND THE INCREASED REPRESENTATION OF CHAVAN'S POLITICAL BASE ALL POINT TO THIS FACT. VASANTRAO PATIL WAS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH SHIV SENA AND HIS POLITICALLY ACTIVE WIFE, MRS SHALINITAI PATIL, HAD CRITICIZED THE

"LEFTIST" POLICIES OF MRS GANDHI. PATIL WAS ALSO IDENTIFIED WITH THE "KULAK" LOBBY IN CONGRESS (R) HERE AND HIS REMOVAL SHOULD WEAKEN THE INFLUENCE OF RICH FARMERS AND SUGAR PRODUCERS IN THE STATE. CHAUDHARI WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE JP MOVEMENT AND IS THE SECOND EXAMPLE OF THESE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED "RESIGNATIONS." NEITHER OF THESE TWO OUTGOING MINISTERS SEEM TO HAVE ENOUGH INFLUENCE TO CREATE ANY PROBLEMS FOR MR CHAVAN IN THE FUTURE. CLEARLY ENJOYING THE FULL SUPPORT OF MRS GANDHI AND MAHARASHTRA'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONGRESS (R) PARTY, CHAVAN NOW HAS THE TEAM OF HIS CHOICE AFTER A YEAR IN OFFICE. IT MAY WELL BE THAT NOW MRS GANDHI MAY EXPECT THE GOM TO MOVE MORE QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY IN IMPLEMENTING HER POLICIES HAVING PUT HER SEAL OF APPROVAL ON THE CABINET CHANGES. COURTNEY

UNQUOTE.
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